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ABSTRACT

The administrators' and teachers' manual for the New York State Preliminary Competency Test in Reading provides information on the student population to be tested; the degrees of reading power (DRP) methodology to measure students' reading comprehension, the test content; and the state reference point, a cutoff score expressed in terms of readability which identifies students who need remediation. Instructions are also given for notifying parents and students about test results and for required record keeping. Also included are guidelines for organizing reading programs; assisting students who score below the cutoff; and using test results to facilitate student learning. Simple letters to be sent to parents indicating test scores are appended. (MH)

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NEW YORK STATE PRELIMINARY COMPETENCY TEST IN

READING

DEGREES OF READING POWER

Manual for Administrators and Teachers

TM009 617

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Foreword

The Regents Competency Testing Program has two basic purposes: (1) to assure the early identification of students who need special help in developing reading, writing and mathematics skills, and (2) to assure that students have acquired adequate competence in these skills before receiving a high school diploma.

To help accomplish the first purpose, the existing State testing program has for many years supplemented local schools' ongoing programs of formal and informal measurement of student achievement by requiring the administration of the New York State Pupil Evaluation Program reading and mathematics tests in grades 3 and 6. Beginning in spring 1979, the Regents Competency Testing Program adds another dimension to the identification process by requiring, with certain exceptions, the administration of preliminary competency tests in reading and in writing to students in grades 8 and 9 (and grade 10 in 1979 only).

To help accomplish its second basic purpose, the Regents Competency Testing Program adds mandated remedial instruction for those students who score below defined points on the Pupil Evaluation Program tests and the preliminary competency tests. Through well-organized, appropriate and systematic treatment and remediation of deficiencies at the early stages of the elementary and secondary school experience, students will be provided with the opportunity to acquire the skills they need to meet the high school graduation standards established by the Regents.

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In addition to this manual, two other publications concerning the New York State Preliminary Competency Test in Reading are available from the Division of Educational Testing:

Directions for Administering and Scoring

Degrees of Reading Power: A Brief Technical Description

The Preliminary Competency Tests

Administration of the preliminary competency tests in reading and in writing is one of the components of the competency testing program adopted by the Board of Regents in February 1979. The administration of these tests and the reporting of scores according to established procedures are the responsibility of the chief school administrator.

Pupils to be Tested

During the 1978–79 school year, the preliminary competency tests must be administered to students in grades 9 and 10, and they may also be administered to students in grade 8. In subsequent years, the tests may be given in either grade 8 or grade 9. The tests need not be administered to all the students in a given grade. Students who meet any one of the criteria listed below may be exempted from taking both the reading and writing preliminary competency tests:

1. Obtained a score of 35 or higher on the Pupil Evaluation Program test in reading administered to them in grade 6.
2. Obtained a score of 37 or higher on the Pupil Evaluation Program test in reading administered to them in grade 9.
3. Obtained a score at or above the nationwide median (50th percentile) on a nationally standardized test in reading administered to them in grades 8 or 9.

In addition, students expecting to graduate in June 1981 who have passed basic competency tests in reading or in writing before February 1979 are considered to have completed the competency test requirements for the diploma in that skill. Such students, therefore, do not need to take a preliminary competency test in that skill.

Administration of the Tests

Materials for the preliminary competency tests in reading and in writing may be ordered using forms provided by the Department. In terms of test security and administration procedures, the preliminary competency tests are similar to commercially published standardized tests and the tests used in the New York State Pupil Evaluation Program. The test booklets are reusable and the tests may be administered at the school's convenience. It is recommended that the preliminary competency tests be given as early in the school year as possible so that identification and remediation of deficiencies may begin at the earliest possible time.

Scoring of the Tests

The preliminary competency tests in reading and in writing must be scored as soon as possible after the tests are administered. Machine-scorable answer sheets are provided for the reading test. The writing test contains no objective questions and must be hand scored. Although machine-scorable answer sheets are provided for the reading test, it is recommended that they be scored by hand. It is essential that remediation begin at the earliest opportunity for those students identified as needing special help, and hand scoring can generally be completed more quickly than machine scoring.

Records and Reports

Beginning with the tests administered in the 1978–79 school year, schools must record on each student's permanent record the names of the tests administered, the dates of administration, and the scores obtained. In addition, schools will be asked to report preliminary competency test results to the Department.

The Competency Testing Program in Reading

The competency testing program in reading has three mandated components: a preliminary competency test, which is designed to identify students in need of remediation and to determine the level of remediation required; an instructional component designed to improve students' reading ability; and a final Regents competency test to determine whether students meet the competency standards set for the high school diploma.

The Reading Competency Tests

The Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) test methodology is used in both the preliminary and final Regents competency tests. The DRP has been under development for several years and is one of the most validated tests ever developed in reading.

The competency tests in reading measure a student's ability to process and understand nonfiction English prose passages written at different levels of difficulty or readability. The tests identify the hardest prose that students can read with comprehension.

The tests are not norm-referenced. The meaning of a student's score does not depend on comparisons with the performance of students in a norming sample. Instead, the tests measure a student's reading ability on an "absolute" scale. Just as a person's height and weight can be measured accurately without reference to how tall or heavy any other person is, so can reading ability be measured by determining on the prose difficulty scale the hardest text that can be read with comprehension.

Both the preliminary and the final Regents competency tests consist of nonfiction prose passages on a variety of topics. Each passage contains about 300 words. The passages are arranged in order of difficulty, beginning with very easy material and progressing to very difficult material. Test items are formed by the deletion of selected words in each passage. Each deleted word is indicated by an underlined blank space. Five response options are provided to the students for completing the blank.

The items are designed so that the text of the passage must be read and understood. All the response options "fit" the blank space: each one makes a grammatically correct and logically plausible sentence if the sentence is considered in isolation. However, only *one* response "fits" or is plausible when the surrounding context of the passage is considered. Therefore, to determine the right answer, students must understand the text surrounding the sentence. If the text is understood, then the one correct answer will be obvious.

The deleted words and the response options are always "easy" or "common" words, no matter how difficult the passage. Thus the test items become more difficult only with respect to the difficulty of the text in the passages. The response options are kept at an easy level in order to assure that answering questions correctly depends on understanding the surrounding prose in the passage. In addition, all the information that is needed to answer the questions is provided in the text of the passages, thus making it more certain that the test measures reading ability, and not prior information that some students may have and others may not.

The design of the tests makes use of the fact that prose varies in difficulty. The term "readability" refers to this characteristic. Text that is very easy to understand is said to be highly readable; more difficult text less readable. Many factors account for the readability of a given text. Among the most important are the difficulty of the vocabulary and the length of sentences. Making use of these and other features, a variety of "formulas" exist that estimate how difficult a given passage of text is. Thus readability can be quantified and measured.

Reading ability can be expressed in terms of the readability or difficulty of text a student can understand. In the school setting, reading ability is often described in terms of the book a student is using; for example, "John is able to read the fourth-grade reader." The competency tests *formalize* the use of a readability scale in describing reading ability by defining reading ability in terms of the probability that students will understand materials of given readability or difficulty levels.

The competency standard in reading for the high school diploma is expressed in terms of the level of difficulty or the readability level of prose. To pass the final competency test, a student must comprehend text at the designated readability level with a .65 likelihood of success. In other words, students must answer correctly 65 percent of the questions on a very large number of passages whose readability corresponds to the standard set by the Regents for issuance of the high school diploma.

The State Reference Point and Remediation Requirements

The preliminary competency test also has a standard expressed in terms of readability. This standard is called the State Reference Point. The State Reference Point is a cut-off score for identifying students who are in need of remediation. It is defined in terms of stu-

dents' ability to comprehend materials they will encounter in high school. Students whose scores fall *at* the State Reference Point have a fifty percent likelihood of successfully comprehending prose material typically used in grades 10 through 12 in required high school courses. Those with scores below the State Reference Point have less than a fifty percent chance of success in comprehending prose materials typically assigned in these courses. The State Reference Point has been established to implement the mandate for remediation: students with scores below the State Reference Point must be given specially designed programs addressed to their needs.

The standard on which the State Reference Point is based will remain constant from year to year: it will always represent a 50% likelihood of success on prose materials typically used in required high school courses. However, the particular raw score (the total number right) on the preliminary competency test which corresponds to the State Reference Point may vary from one form of the test to another because of differences in the readability levels of the passages used in a particular form. For Form A of the New York State Preliminary Competency Test in Reading, the State Reference Point is a raw score of 59; that is, students who achieve scores of 58 and below are considered to be in need of some type and degree of remediation.

In accord with the mandate for identification of students requiring remediation, five placement groups have been constituted in relation to the State Reference Point. Table 1 lists the five groups according to raw score (total number right) on Form A of the New York State Preliminary Competency Test in Reading and indicates the administrative action, if any, required for each group.

Notifying Students and Parents about Test Results and Placement Decisions

After the preliminary competency test has been given, students and parents must be informed of the student's raw score, its implications, and the school's placement decisions. Students and their parents must also be informed of the content and scope of the reading programs which students are to receive. They should be advised about other reading activities that students should undertake on their own to improve reading skills. At a minimum, information similar to that which appears in Appendix I must be given both to the parents of students who score below the State Reference Point and to the students themselves. For those students whose raw scores fall between the State Reference Point (59 correct) and 70, information similar to that which appears in Appendix II should be provided.

Required Records

Schools are required to maintain individual records for students in all categories requiring special assistance, *i.e.* those students scoring below the State Reference Point. These records must indicate the assistance provided over time and must document progress in the ability to read. It is prudent to keep on file copies of all correspondence sent to each student and his or her parents.

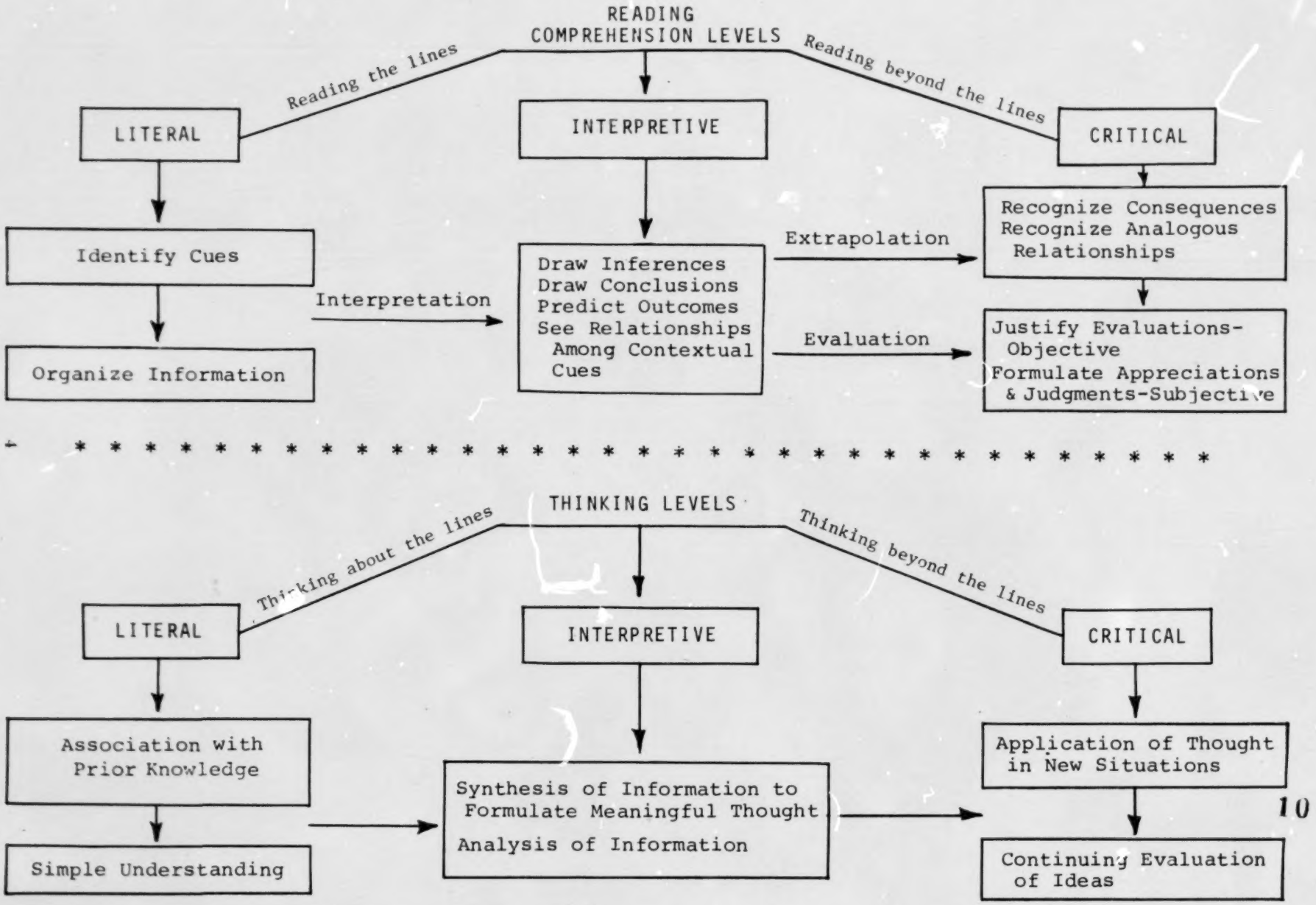
TABLE 1

Placement Decisions Based on the New York State Preliminary Competency Test in Reading, Form A

Total Number Correct	Comment	Required Administrative Decisions
70 or above	Probably will pass the final Regents competency test	None mandated
59 to 69	At and just above the State Reference Point	Emphasize reading in courses
53 to 58	Just below the State Reference Point	Must provide some remediation within the general curriculum
45 to 52	Below the State Reference Point	Must provide remediation beyond that included in the general curriculum
44 or below	Very far below the State Reference Point	Must provide intense individualized remediation

CHART 1

GOALS OF READING INSTRUCTION



The Development of Reading Skills and the Remediation of Reading Problems

The dimensions of reading ability extend from comprehension at its most basic literal level to the acquisition of high order interpretive and analytical skills. A primary objective of the school program should be to provide opportunities for all students to achieve the maximum reading level that they are able to reach. Presented in Chart 1 is a hierarchical display of both the major goals of reading instruction and the process by which these goals are commonly achieved. Students should be challenged to make as much progress as possible toward achieving these goals.

Guidelines for Organizing Reading Programs

The preliminary competency test in reading identifies the most difficult prose a student can read with comprehension; therefore, it can be used as a basis for planning programs both for students who already have adequate reading skills and for students whose scores indicate a need for various amounts and types of remediation. In organizing programs both to refine the skills of able readers and to provide remediation geared to correcting reading problems of various degrees of severity, the concepts inherent in the following guidelines should be given primary emphasis:

- Comprehension at the level at which students are able to grasp, reorganize, and restate the message of written material is a fundamental prerequisite for more advanced levels of comprehension and for the development of understanding at higher interpretive or critical levels.
- Students must be asked to read prose that not only falls within their instructional level but also is sufficiently challenging to stimulate growth.
- The further students are below the State Reference Point, the more opportunities they must be given to learn to read with comprehension.
- The development of reading skills and the remediation of reading problems is a responsibility of all areas of the curriculum, not merely of the language arts and reading programs.
- Developmental and remedial programs should encourage students to acquire and refine reading skills by taking advantage of the interests of high school age students.
- Because writing skills also need to be developed, school programs should require that students write about what they have read.

Obviously, programs based upon these guidelines require a significant commitment of school resources, instructional time, and staff effort. It is only through such commitment on an organized and continuing basis that the reading skills of all students can be developed.

In order to assist schools in developing the reading skills of all students, the Bureau of Reading Education at the State Education Department will distribute the publication *Comprehension Through Active Processing*. The main focus of this publication is on reading activities aimed at concept development in various areas of the curriculum. Several strategies which are useful at the intermediate and secondary high school levels are suggested for developing student abilities. These strategies are designed to help students attain the reading and information-processing skills required for successful performance on the preliminary and final Regents competency tests in reading.

Providing Assistance in the Development of Reading Skills

The preliminary competency test in reading classifies students into groups according to their reading ability as indicated by their total score on the test. The following paragraphs define these groups and, for each group, discuss recommended developmental strategies and mandated remedial instruction.

Recommended Special Assistance: Students Scoring Above the State Reference Point

For students who achieve raw scores between 59 and 98 on Form A of the New York State Preliminary Competency Test in Reading, no special reading instruction is mandated. However, in keeping with the goal of upgrading the reading and writing skills of all students, attention should be given to refining the reading and writing abilities of these students.

These students should be encouraged to exercise more discipline in reading carefully, not only for facts but also for meaning, in the most sophisticated sense. Formal and informal opportunities should be provided to help students achieve those higher-order levels of information processing that have traditionally been identified by a variety of labels which encompass both reading and writing skills: literary criticism, scientific communication, political, economic, historical and

sociological analyses, etc. Writing tasks, which have traditionally been employed as a major method of evaluating students' understanding of what they have read, should be integrated into all areas of the curriculum.

The results of the preliminary competency test may be used to identify the different emphases in reading instruction needed by students scoring above the State Reference Point. (For this reason, schools may elect to administer the test to more of the eighth and ninth grade population than the Commissioner's Regulations stipulate.) Those students who achieve raw scores in the 90's should be challenged in their regular high school courses to read and write to the highest possible standards. For example, in mathematics courses, such students should be assigned to read and interpret mathematical discourse.

Those students who achieve raw scores in the 70's and 80's must acquire information-processing skills which are prerequisite to interpretive reading and writing tasks requiring disciplined thought. These students need to engage in a variety of activities involving writing about what they learn from reading, and to defend their perceptions.

Students who achieve raw scores between 59 and 69 are at and just above the State Reference Point and need special attention for the development and maintenance of reading skills necessary for success on the final Regents competency test. Greater emphasis should be placed on reading for information and on writing clear and organized prose based upon the content of reading assignments in various high school courses. The amount of time spent in purposeful reading and writing activities should increase in all courses.

Mandated Special Assistance: Students Scoring Below the State Reference Point

Providing special assistance has been mandated by the Regents for students scoring below the State Reference Point. The results of the preliminary competency test are useful in identifying the amount and kind of assistance which will assure each student the supportive services needed to achieve the standard set for reading competency prior to taking the final Regents competency tests.

For purposes of planning appropriate instructional programs, students scoring below the State Reference Point or cut-off score (59 correct on Form A of the New York State Preliminary Competency Test in Reading) may be viewed as constituting three groups:

1. Students whose scores fall between 53 and 59. Students in this group, if given intensified appropriate reading instruction *within* their required high school courses, will probably achieve the level of competency required for high school graduation.

2. Students whose scores fall between 45 and 52. Students in this group will need the type of assistance usually referred to as corrective reading. Corrective instruction must be provided beyond that included in the general curriculum.

3. Students whose scores fall at or below 44. Students in this group exhibit serious reading deficiencies and will require intensive personalized remedial assistance in all reading skills.

Once students have been identified as falling in one of the three classifications described, schools have many alternatives for providing the special assistance as mandated by Section 103.2 of the Commissioner's Regulations.

Students Whose Raw Scores Fall Between 53 and 59

For students in this group, schools must provide some remediation within the general curriculum. Schools should examine existing courses of study in major disciplines and make adjustments within these courses that will increase the proportion of time allocated for developing the reading skills inherent in the mastery of content presented to students through print. Schools may need to develop sequential learning activities in each major content area to assist students in using texts and other printed materials containing information important to the subject being taught. Summaries, essay tests and similar written products explaining the content of expository prose materials should be required. Extra assistance in the form of peer group tutoring or after-school study programs may also be offered.

Initiating such program changes may require additional staff development through inservice or through local curriculum development projects. The *Inservice Reading Resource Kit*, Volume II, Packages VII and IX, available from the Bureau of Reading Education at the State Education Department, may prove useful in both of these areas. In addition, reading specialists (where available) may be used as resource personnel in providing inservice training and in developing a curriculum which provides appropriate reading instruction for these students within the existing framework of required subject areas.

Another alternative is the scheduling of students into existing secondary reading laboratories on a short-term basis for reinforcement of specific basic reading and vocabulary skills. If this alternative is selected, it is important that the laboratory staff work closely with content teachers to develop the particular skills these students will need to use in fulfilling reading assignments in their required courses.

In most cases, if *appropriate attention and instructional time* are devoted to reading activities dealing

with the interpretation or the processing of the expository text which appears in school books and in supplementary materials, students in this group can be expected to reach or surpass the level of reading comprehension required for passing the final Regents competency test.

Students Whose Raw Scores Fall Between 45 and 52

For students in this group, schools must provide remediation beyond that included in the general curriculum. A prerequisite for planning corrective instruction for these students is individual diagnosis to determine to what degree decoding, comprehension and other deficiencies limit the full development of reading ability. Instruction may be provided as part of a modified curriculum in English Language Arts stressing basic skills in both reading and writing, since many students in this group have more general language deficiencies affecting writing skills as well as reading.

Schools may consider several models for organizing and providing corrective programs which will accelerate both general reading and writing skills. For example, modified English programs such as the Newburgh and Webutuck Demonstration Programs* have successfully combined developmental and corrective language strands. In these programs, the length of the class period is extended and reading specialists are teamed with English teachers to individualize direct instruction in basic reading skills and to help teachers reinforce these skills in other reading activities in the course of study.

Another model that schools may consider is the reading laboratory or reading center. In this model, centers staffed by certified reading teachers and ancillary personnel provide individual plans for each student. Learning activities are focused on students' needs as diagnosed by the specialist in charge. The laboratory program is designed to establish and reinforce the earlier developmental skills which many students have not yet acquired. For instance, achieving the degree of automaticity in word recognition usually exhibited by fluent readers and mastering basic elementary comprehension skills are often primary objectives of laboratory programs. In successful laboratory programs, materials are carefully selected to fall within the instructional level of individual students as described in a subsequent section of this manual, "Using The Preliminary Competency Test to Facilitate Student Learning."

Another alternative that schools may wish to consider is providing supplementary small group instruction. This type of instruction must be provided by certified reading teachers and should be articulated with instruction provided in other courses. Students should be scheduled for corrective reading no fewer than three days each week for periods *at least 40 minutes* in length. As in the reading laboratory model, students' programs should be based on individual needs and should be provided through activities using materials best suited to individual instructional levels.

These options are supplementary in nature and represent services above and beyond those usually provided in regular classroom programs. Both ESEA Title I and PSEN funds may be used to support the services described for those students eligible for corrective instruction.

At the same time that students in this group are receiving supplementary instruction, carefully directed reading activities related to content areas should also be provided as an integral part of instruction in English, social studies, science, and other curricular areas. The Demonstration ESEA IV-C program at East Syracuse-Minoa Central Schools is an excellent model for incorporating reading instruction in these courses.*

Students Whose Raw Scores Are 44 or Lower

These students have substantial reading deficiencies which will require intensive remediation. Schools may wish to introduce such practices as Mastery Teaching** and/or offer special programs in English Language Arts, social studies, science and other curricular areas. The major goals in such special programs should be the acquisition of basic skills. For these students major concepts in social studies, mathematics and science may need to be presented using a variety of audio-visual media, and then properly reinforced by carefully directed reading and writing activities which will clarify and extend concepts initially presented through other multi-sensory approaches.

For some students alternative high school programs may be needed. Highly motivating work/study or vocationally oriented programs may meet such students' needs. For others, alternative high schools or street academies designed to address needs and interests of students who have not functioned successfully in traditional high school settings are an option. All such students should receive careful guidance and counseling to encourage the maximum development of their potential abilities and skills.

To assist schools further, a more detailed publication delineating other options and describing those in-

* Further information on these particular programs may be obtained from Newburgh Free Academy, Newburgh, New York 12550 and Webutuck High School, Amenia, New York 12501.

*Information is available from East Syracuse-Minoa Central Schools, East Syracuse, New York 13057.

**Information is available from E. T. Maleska Intermediate School, 456 White Plains Road, Bronx, New York 10472.

cluded in this Administrator's Manual in greater detail will be released in the spring of 1979.

Documentation of Remediation

Once a student has been identified as requiring remediation it is essential that the school document the remedial activities or program provided, the level of student participation, and student progress toward the achievement of the competency standard in reading required for the high school diploma.

The records for each student should include diagnostic data; an accurate description of the remediation program including the teaching approaches and materials used; the length and total duration of daily remedial activity; the student's attendance and level of participation; and frequent checks on growth in comprehension abilities using text on ascending levels of difficulty, leading to the standard set by the Regents for issuance of the high school diploma.

Using the Preliminary Competency Test To Facilitate Student Learning

Results of the preliminary competency test can be used to manage reading instruction. Test results can be used for placement purposes in grouping students of comparable ability, for deciding if a particular student is capable of reading text at the level required of students in a course, or for selecting a text or other materials to match a particular student's instructional needs. To make these decisions, and to determine how much special assistance and remedial work needs to be undertaken with students earning a raw score below 70 on the preliminary competency test, it is necessary to understand certain basic concepts and test scores used in DRP methodology. A general discussion of these concepts is given below. More extensive information is provided in the publication *Degrees of Reading Power: A Brief Technical Description*, available from the Division of Educational Testing at the State Education Department.

Prose Difficulty or Readability

Prose varies in difficulty: it ranges from being very easy to understand at the one extreme, to very hard at the other. This variability is called readability.

While many factors determine the readability of prose, two or three factors have been shown to account for major differences in prose difficulty. The greater the proportion of common, frequently used words in a sample text, the easier the text is to read. The higher the frequency of simple, short sentences, the easier the prose. Therefore, the readability of prose can be measured by counting the proportion of common words and by calculating average sentence length.

A variety of readability formulas specify how to combine various factors or characteristics of prose. Some formulas (e.g., Spache and Dale/Chall) interpret readability in terms of the grade level at which material is most likely to be used. Although this practice produces simple readability scores, it very often leads to misunderstandings. In order to avoid these sources of confusion and to use the most technically valid measures available, a new measure of readability is being introduced through the DRP tests. On the preliminary and final Regents competency tests, readability is measured in Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) units.

The Measurement of Readability

DRP units form a scale of prose difficulty or readability. The scale ranges from 15 to 100 units. A score of 15 DRP units describes the easiest prose that anyone might ever encounter. It is easier than text normally found in the English language. At the other extreme of the scale, a score of 100 DRP units represents the most difficult prose imaginable. In practice, the range of commonly encountered English text runs from about 30 DRP units at the easy end to about 85 DRP units at the difficult end.

On Form A of the New York State Preliminary Competency Test in Reading, the readability levels of the passages range from 38 to 81 DRP units. Table 2 is designed to help the reader understand the scale of DRP units by presenting the readability of various passages both in DRP units and in Spache/Dale-Chall values.

TABLE 2

The Readability of Prose Samples in DRP Units and Spache or Dale-Chal[1] Grade Levels: A Conversion Table[1]

	Readability	
	DRP Units	Spache/Dale-Chall[2]
A bird's wings are well-shaped for flight. The wing is curved. It cuts the air. This helps lift the bird. The feathers are light. But they are strong. They help make birds the best fliers. A bird can move them in many directions. Birds move their wings forward and down. Then they move them up and back. This is how they fly. The tail feathers serve as a brake. They also aid in steering.	38	2.8
A bark canoe proved to be better than a log canoe for several reasons. It hauled heavier loads. It glided more smoothly. A log canoe was hard to repair. But cracked, torn, or worn bark could be mended quickly. A bark canoe weighed less than a log canoe. It was so light a lone man could carry it. A log canoe could be no longer than a tree. But a bark canoe was different. It could be almost any length.	43	3.8
The part of a beach between high and low tide is called the middle beach. It is home to many plants and animals. But life on this middle beach is hard. There is no protection against the wash of the oncoming waves. Some animals survive by digging holes in the sand. They can stay in their homes under ground. The undertow will not pull them out to sea. They are safe.	47	5–6
Most creatures take great care to protect their eggs. The walking stick does not. It just drops its eggs, scattering them loosely on the ground. Dozens and dozens drop at a time. As the eggs fall onto dry leaves, they sound like raindrops falling. Many of the eggs do not hatch. But enough do so that the walking sticks will not die out. They have existed on earth since before the era of the dinosaurs.	51	5–6

Note: [1]The readability calculations are based upon longer samples.

[2]Spache (1953) values are calculated for materials from grades one through three, and Dale-Chall (1948) values are calculated for materials from grade four to "college-level."

TABLE 2 (Cont.)

The Readability of Prose Samples in DRP Units and Spache or Dale-Chall Grade Levels: A Conversion Table[1]

	Readability	
	DRP Units	Spache/Dale-Chall[2]
Between 1935 and 1939, some 350,000 migrants crossed the border from Arizona to California. These migrants came mainly from Oklahoma and Arkansas. For this reason they were called Okies or Arkies. They came from areas badly parched by drought. Lack of rain, combined with strong winds, had meant the loss of countless tons of topsoil. The area was aptly called the "Dust Bowl."	55	7–8
The most ancient hand tool yet identified is the stone hand ax. Such instruments are more than 250,000 years old. Hand axes were made either from flint or from a fine-grained rock that would provide a sharp edge. Using a second stone, flakes were hammered off around the edges. The resulting tool had a jagged cutting edge down each side. It had a crude point and a smooth, round butt. During the thousands of years in which this tool was used, it underwent relatively slight changes in form.	60	9–10
Wall paintings are especially vulnerable to atmospheric change. Archaeologists know this. Hence they try to discover, before opening a tomb, whether they will find murals. Special tools have been designed for this purpose. One of the most useful is a kind of camera that can be dropped into the ground before the digging starts. If the camera indicates the presence of wall art, scientists can prepare to take steps to preserve the painting as soon as it is reached.	64	11–12
The ancient Romans' concept of justice and their view of individual rights continue to be guiding forces in contemporary western society. Their code, developed by the emperor Justinian, provided, for example, that no person was punishable for his thoughts, that fathers could not be compelled to bear witness against their sons, nor sons against their fathers, and that the burden of proof rested with the accuser, not with the party denying the accusation.	72	13–15
Thomas Jefferson's belief in man's ability to govern himself is well known, but his views concerning the conditions under which this ability can be successfully realized are less familiar. Jefferson believed that a natural moral sense—which he assumed to be a universal characteristic of mankind—was the initial and basic prerequisite for self-government. The effective operation of this moral sense was then influenced, he believed, by environmental factors, in particular by economic circumstances.	81	16+

Note: [1]The readability calculations are based upon longer samples.

[2]Spache (1953) values are calculated for materials from grades one through three, and Dale-Chall (1948) values are calculated for materials from grade four to "college-level."

Reading Ability and Prose Difficulty

DRP technology enables predictions to be made concerning the difficulty of prose that a student can read with comprehension. The passages on the preliminary competency test are arranged in order of difficulty from easiest to hardest, and the difficulty of the test items is linked to the readability of the passages. Therefore, the greater the number of test items that the student answers correctly, the harder the text the student can read with comprehension.

With DRP technology, it is possible to convert the total number of items answered correctly (*i.e.* the total raw score) to a readability level, which is a prediction of the readability of prose that a student can read with comprehension. It is also possible to convert the total raw score into several different readability levels, or predictions of the readability of prose that a student can read with various likelihoods of success. The likelihood of success, or the degree of comprehension with which a student can read prose of a specified readability level, is provided for three specific and educationally important ability levels: independent reading level, instructional reading level, and frustration level. In order to provide the most appropriate instruction for a student, teachers must know which materials are useful at the student's independent level and instructional level, and which materials cannot be used under almost any conditions because they are too difficult or frustrating.

The common way of defining these three levels has been in terms of the proportion of test items that the student answers correctly. Materials at the independent level are commonly defined as those on which the student can answer correctly at least 90% of the items. Materials at the instructional level are commonly defined as those on which the student can answer correctly at least 75% of the items. Materials on which the student can answer correctly only 50% of the items are commonly considered to be at the frustration level. An alternative way of stating these definitions is that the independent, instructional and frustration levels are, respectively, those prose readability levels at which test items would be answered with a .90, .75 and .50 likelihood of success. Through the use of DRP technology, the test score can identify these three levels for each student.

Converting Raw Scores to Reading Ability Levels

The DRP raw score is the total number of questions answered correctly. It does not by itself provide information concerning what materials the student can read with what likelihoods of success. To give meaning to raw scores they must be converted to DRP units. Table 3 is used for this purpose. In this table, raw scores are translated into predictions concerning students' ability to read prose materials that have different readability values.

The first column at the left of Table 3 gives the raw score, that is, the total number of questions answered correctly on Form A of the New York State Preliminary Competency Test in Reading. The entries in the remaining columns are expressed in DRP units. For any given raw score, the column labeled "Independent Level (P = .90)" gives the readability of materials in DRP units for which a student with that raw score has a .90 likelihood of success. Since such a student would also be expected to answer correctly at least 90% of questions based on any easier materials, the tabled entry defines the hardest prose suitable for the independent level. Any easier prose would also fall within the student's independent level.

The set of columns labeled "Instructional Level (P = .75)" gives the readability of materials in DRP units for which students have about a .75 likelihood of success. Because the instructional level is more properly thought of as a range of difficulty rather than a single point, the table shows the range as one standard error (4 DRP units) on either side of the "exact value." Thus a lower and upper boundary of the instructional level are defined for each raw score.

The extreme right-hand column entry labeled "Frustration Level (P = .50)" identifies the readability of materials on which students have a 50–50 chance of responding correctly. This level of performance has traditionally defined a frustration level for the student. Such materials would be too difficult for most students to use profitably. The entry shown in the extreme right-hand column defines the point at which the frustration level begins.

As an example, Table 3 indicates that a student who achieves a raw score of 70 can read and comprehend at the independent level prose materials with a readability level of 49 DRP units or below. The exact instructional level for the same student falls at 59 DRP units. The upper and lower bounds for the instructional range are 62 and 56 DRP units, respectively. Therefore, the instructional level of materials for this student can appropriately be as easy as 56 DRP units or as difficult as 62 DRP units. This student may be expected to comprehend material within this range of readability, with instructional support. The final column entry for this same student indicates that materials with DRP unit values of 69 and above will be at the frustration level.

Note that in some columns there are no entries for the very high and very low raw scores. At the high end of the table, a student with a raw score of 97 can read independently materials with a DRP unit value of

TABLE 3

Predictions From DRP Raw Scores to the Readability of Prose (in DRP Units) Which Can Be Read at Different Comprehension Levels

New York State Preliminary Competency Test in Reading, Form A

Total Items Right	Independent Level (P=.90)	Instructional Level (P=.75)			Frustration Level (P=.50)
		Lower Bound	Exact Value	Upper Bound	
97	88	95	98		
96	81	88	91	95	
95	77	84	87	91	97
94	74	81	84	88	95
93	72	79	82	85	92
92	70	77	80	83	90
91	68	75	78	82	88
90	67	74	77	80	87
89	65	72	75	79	85
88	64	71	74	77	84
87	63	70	73	76	83
86	62	69	72	75	82
85	61	68	71	74	81
84	60	67	70	73	80
83	59	66	69	72	79
82	58	65	68	71	78
81	57	64	67	70	77
80	56	63	66	69	76
79	55	62	65	69	75
78	54	61	64	68	75
77	54	61	64	67	74
76	53	60	63	66	73
75	52	59	62	65	72
74	51	58	62	65	72
73	51	58	61	64	71
72	50	57	60	63	70
71	49	56	59	63	70
70	49	56	59	62	69
69	48	55	58	61	68
68	47	54	57	61	68
67	47	54	57	60	67
66	46	53	56	59	66
65	45	52	56	59	66
64	45	52	55	58	65
63	44	51	54	58	64

TABLE 3 (Cont.)

Predictions From DRP Raw Scores to the Readability of Prose (in DRP Units) Which Can Be Read at Different Comprehension Levels

New York State Preliminary Competency Test in Reading, Form A

Total Items Right	Independent Level (P=.90)	Instructional Level (P=.75)			Frustration Level (P=.50)
		Lower Bound	Exact Value	Upper Bound	
62	44	50	54	57	64
61	43	50	53	56	63
60	42	49	53	56	63
59	42	49	52	55	62
58	41	48	51	55	61
57	41	47	51	54	61
56	40	47	50	53	60
55	39	46	50	53	60
54	39	46	49	52	59
53	38	45	48	52	58
52	38	45	48	51	58
51	37	44	47	50	57
50	37	43	47	50	57
49	36	43	46	49	56
48	35	42	46	49	56
47	35	42	45	48	55
46	34	41	44	48	55
45	34	41	44	47	54
44	33	40	43	46	53
43	33	39	43	46	53
42	32	39	42	45	52
41	31	38	42	45	52
40	31	38	41	44	51
39	30	37	40	44	51
38	30	37	40	43	50
37	29	36	39	42	49
36	29	35	39	42	49
35	28	35	38	41	48
34	27	34	37	41	48
33	27	34	37	40	47
32	26	33	36	39	46
31	26	33	36	39	46
30	25	32	35	38	45
29	24	31	34	38	45
28	24	31	34	37	44

TABLE 3 (Cont.)

Predictions From DRP Raw Scores to the Readability of Prose (in DRP Units) Which Can Be Read at Different Comprehension Levels

New York State Preliminary Competency Test in Reading, Form A

Total Items Right	Independent Level (P=.90)	Instructional Level (P=.75)			Frustration Level (P=.50)
		Lower Bound	Exact Value	Upper Bound	
27	23	30	33	36	43
26	22	29	33	36	43
25	22	29	32	35	42
24	21	28	31	34	41
23	20	27	31	34	41
22	20	27	30	33	40
21	19	26	29	32	39
20	18	25	28	32	39
19	18	25	28	31	38
18	17	24	27	30	37
17	16	23	26	29	36
16	15	22	25	28	35
15		21	24	28	35
14		20	23	27	34
13		19	23	26	33
12		18	22	25	32
11		17	20	24	31
10		16	19	23	29
9			18	21	28
8			17	20	27
7			15	18	25
6				17	24
5					22
4					19
3					17
2 and below		*** All Values Below 15 ***			

88, which is very difficult text. At the easy end of the table, cells are left empty when there are *no materials easy enough* to fill them. For example, a student with a raw score of 8 on Form A is a poor reader. The tabled values show that there are no materials easy enough for this student to use at the independent level. Materials with a DRP unit value of 17 are within such a student's instructional level, but the range is bounded only at one side: there are no materials easy enough to define a lower bound or "easy" end for this student's instructional level. Fifteen DRP units define the lower end of the DRP scale and represent the easiest possible prose that might be found in English.

In the table there is no row of DRP unit values for a perfect raw score of 98. This occurs because the statistical procedures used for making predictions do not apply to a student who answers all the items on the test correctly. In effect, since such a student has not been given any questions that he or she could not answer, the limit of this student's ability is unknown and hence specific predictions cannot be made concerning which materials are suitable for which purposes. It is safe to assume, however, that no materials will pose significant reading problems for such a student.

Matching DRP Units and Textbook Readability

DRP units will help match student ability to the difficulty of materials so that sufficient "challenge" is maintained. When materials are too easy for students, there is no need for them to work to increase their abilities and they may become bored. On the other hand, when materials are too difficult, students may become frustrated and will not learn at an optimal rate. Their frustration often leads to adverse consequences; they may become bored, hostile, and self-disparaging. Therefore, in general, reading assignments at or below the frustration level should be avoided.

To help teachers use the results of the preliminary competency test to match student ability to the difficulty of instructional materials, the Department is preparing *A Listing of Textbook Readability in Degrees of Reading Power Units*. Textbooks currently used in New York State schools are being identified by means of a survey, and their readability is being calculated in DRP units. Listings will be published of textbooks arranged by content area and grouped within content area according to levels of readability. The listings will facilitate rapid determination of the appropriateness of books for instruction and for independent work. Books that are too easy or too difficult for a given student can also be identified by referring to the listings. The first listing covering books used in grades 8 and 9 will be provided to schools as soon as possible, and no later than fall 1979. By using these readability listings together with a measure of student ability in DRP units, teachers will be able to prescribe the appropriate match between student ability and the difficulty of instructional materials.

Prior to the publication of this readability listing and before the difficulty of a sufficient quantity of materials can be analyzed, interim procedures can be employed to attempt to control the degree of match between student reading ability and the readability of instructional materials. In the simplest procedure, results of the preliminary competency test can be used to rank students in terms of the difficulty of the text they should use for independent and instructional work. The available materials within a class or a building or a district can also be ranked. (Research has shown that adults are able to rank-order the difficulty of prose material, and that their judgments are rather accurate.) The most difficult of the available materials can then be assigned to the students of highest ability, the next most difficult to students of next highest ability, and so on until the easiest materials are assigned to students of lowest ability.

If a more accurate match is desired, a related interim procedure may be used. In this case, the prose materials which are available for instruction are again ranked in order of difficulty. These materials can then be assigned approximate readability scores in DRP units by matching them with the samples in Table 2. Once this has been accomplished, the information in Table 3 can be used to match student ability with the readability of materials used in instruction.

The interim procedures may reveal that the easiest materials available in the school are not easy enough for the poorest readers, and the hardest materials available are not challenging enough for the best readers. In these instances, schools will be especially interested in using the forthcoming DRP textbook readability listings to guide future purchasing decisions.

Grouping Students for Instruction

Earlier in this manual, five student groups were identified on the basis of total test raw scores. Three of these groups were established to identify students who must be provided with remedial course work in accordance with the Regents' mandate. The groups described in Table 1 were also constituted in order to indicate the kind and amount of instructional activities needed by students with various scores on Form A of the New York State Preliminary Competency Test in Reading.

The information provided in Table 3 can be used for proper placement of students in special remedial pro-

grams in terms of the difficulty of the instructional materials to be used. In addition, the information can be used to place students in different classes of regularly scheduled courses in English, social studies, health, or other subjects. If some classes in these content area courses are to provide more reading instruction (for example, by increasing the volume of prose reading assignments, by requiring more written summaries of what has been read, by posing more essay-type questions about what students have read, by requiring organized talks or presentations about what they have read, and so on), then preliminary competency test scores can be used to place students in such classes. Since students can be rank ordered in terms of their ability as indicated by their test scores, students with similar scores can be assigned to appropriate sections. The fact that the instructional levels listed in Table 3 overlap for successive raw scores on Form A, makes it easier for schools to group students for section assignments and for teachers to select students for small-group instruction.

Appendix I

The sample letter below contains the type of information that schools must provide the parent(s) or guardian(s) of students with scores below 59, the State Reference Point. When appropriate, the letter should be written in the native language of the parent(s).

Dear (Mr. and Mrs. Smith):

Your (daughter Mary) took the New York State Preliminary Competency Test in Reading on (date) and correctly answered (49) of the 98 questions on the test.

(Mary's) test score indicates that (she) probably will not be able to read many of the books commonly used in high school courses. (Mary's) score also shows that (she) does not read well enough to pass the Regents competency test in reading, and (she) must take and pass this test in grade 11 and/or grade 12 in order to receive a high school diploma. It is, therefore, very clear that (Mary) must improve (her) reading ability.

In order to help (Mary) improve (her) reading ability, we are placing (her) in a special reading program called: _____. A description of this program is enclosed with this letter.

As parents, you can also help (Mary) improve (her) reading skills. You can encourage (her) to do a lot of reading at home. The more (she) reads, the more (her) reading will improve. (She) should read whatever interests (her) and should read as much as possible.

If you have any questions about (Mary's) test score or (her) special reading program, or about how you can help improve (her) reading, please call ( ) at (telephone number).

Sincerely yours,

(School Administrator)

Enc.

Appendix II

The sample letter below contains the type of information that schools must provide the parent(s) or guardian(s) of students with scores from 59–69, just above the State Reference Point. When appropriate, the letter should be written in the native language of the parent(s).

Dear (Mr. and Mrs. Smith):

Your (son John) took the New York State Preliminary Competency Test in Reading on (date) and correctly answered (63) of the 98 questions on the test.

This test score indicates that (John) does not yet read well enough to pass the Regents competency test in reading which (he) will be taking in grade 11 and/or grade 12. (He) must pass that test in order to receive a high school diploma. It is very important, therefore, that (John) continue to improve (his) reading ability.

As we work with (John) on improving (his) reading, you can also help. One way (John) can improve (his) reading is to do a lot of it. You, therefore, can help by encouraging (him) to read at home. (He) should read whatever interests (him); the more (he) reads, the better (he) will be able to read.

If you want to know more about the competency tests or how to help (John) read better, please call ( ) at (telephone number).

Sincerely yours,

(School Administrator)